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ABSTRACT

Human sexuality is discussed in terms of misconceptions about its function and the changing sexual needs of older adults. A review of history indicates that human sexuality has traditionally been connected with ideas of purity and strict importance of procreation. Judaeo-Christian ethics and the doctrine of Saint Augustine illustrate these theories. Attitudes of the Victorian age and the Puritanical era lend further support. However, the author suggests that the true purpose of human sexuality is the sexual fulfillment of individuals through respect, concern, and support. One modern-day myth about human sexuality is the belief that sexual potency diminishes and possibly vanishes at age 40. Presumably this belief is related to menopause, at which time women may not be sexually receptive and therefore men may think they should no longer expect or require sexual fulfillment. The author explains that if people are aware of the continued need for sexual fulfillment throughout life, they should be able to cope with common problems of middle age and old age. (AV)

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MYTHS OF HUMAN SEXUALITY IN THE AGING

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The problem of aging has many concerns. Among these concerns is human sexuality. The purpose of this paper is to present some of the problems of human sexuality in the aging and to answer some of the myths and legends which have arisen about the subject.

We are aware of the two strongest drives found in persons, namely, hunger and sex. Our attention will be focused on the second of these drives, human sexuality.

Influenced by the Judeao-Christian concept we are led to the idea of purity in human sexuality. The seventh commandment of the Mosaic law reads, "Thou shalt not commit adultery." The law according to the best research was also found before the day of Moses in the Persian King's code. The King being Hammurabi. No doubt, there has been an evolution of thought and act from the earliest times concerning human sexuality. Today it appears we are more intelligent and we are more at liberty to discuss the subject of human sexuality. Thus, in the formation of ideas concerning human life and sexuality we have at least in some areas improved on our knowledge and understanding.

Certainly in the formation of families, the protection of the species, male and female, evidences of possession, concern, protection and dominance are clear. This is true whether the family, the group or the community be monogymous, polyandrus, polygamous or communal. Through the evolving stages of growth within family development persons have become more understanding, more intelligent. It is necessary to say that no society has a

universal code for all mankind concerning sexuality. We would be guilty of gross ethnocentrism, if we considered that to be true. It is necessary to appreciate this development and use it for humanity. We have long believed, apparently for the physical and mental health of husband and wife or even consenting persons the monogymous form of contact, more specifically, the monogymous marriage, the most stablizing and constructive form for our society. Hence, we find the purity of the concept has been structured in the Judeao-Christian thought and theology and persons have accepted the statements and beliefs and practice without question.

Basically, one would not have any concern about the monogymous relation if through the years of development the goals for a better society were achieved and fulfillment derived from participating persons. Many do in fact, point to various institutions, such as home, school, society and community, as proof of the fact.

Let us now turn to some of the exact theories of human-sexuality. Early in the concepts of culture are the stories of creation. After examination we find all cultures have had and retain their story of creation. Emanating from these stories of creation are the legends, and tales of human creation and human sexuality. It would appear these stories of birth and change, were attempts to explain the phenomena. Witness the cults and fertility rites of various civilizations.

In our own society it is commonly thought that the so-called error of Adam and Eve was sexual. Thus, the sin of the so-called

first parents was sexual in nature and because of this act all persons, at least born in this tradition, are the result of this sin, known as original sin. It may be here that the act through the centuries of time produced such thoughts as the act being dirty, filty, vulgar and something to endured. Not so.

We come now to one of the misconceptions concerning human-sexuality, namely, that the primary purpose of human sexuality is pro-creation. In the theology of Saint Augustine this idea was further espoused. One is forced to ask, was it the influence of Augustine's mother, Monica, she being a Christian, upon him that caused him to support the idea or was it that he at a younger age became the father of a child out of wedlock and the resulting shame led him to his doctrine. No doubt, there were others who made the same interpretation and maybe it was the signs of the time. Nevertheless, it greatly influenced the thought and the action of centuries of people and is still thought to be in some circles, the main purpose of human sexuality. Looking at the past and present interpretation one is led to the belief that society has adopted the doctrine often without question, that human-sexuality was mainly for pro-creation. Possibly there was a time when this was accepted due to the smallest of population and possibly due at times to the desire to control through population. The theory being, the more we can produce, the more we can train, the more we can control, the more we can manipulate. The idea is further engendered in the Victorian Age and the Puritianical era. Human-sexuality is only for pro-creation. The misunderstanding

of human sexuality, led to many false ideas, strict patriarchalism, marriages of toleration, divorce and many other social problems. Now the problem is that many who are considered advanced in age still hold to these views and having been taught in them still cling to them.

What therefore is the purpose of human sexuality? The basic purpose is the fulfillment of the persons engaged in the act. The fulfillment is based on the agape type of love wherein this love is manifest in an intelligent and supportive manner. The idea being that of respect, concern, and support. Accordingly, the potentialities continue through the life of the participants. The theory does not rule out the idea of pro-creation, it merely places the emphasis upon the sexual fulfillment of two individuals and leaves the question of pro-creation to those individuals. Returning to the consideration of the two basic drives of the human; hunger and sex and dealing with the second of these drives we see the second drive is a natural outgrowth of life and does not greatly diminish with age, but is influenced by uninvestigated beliefs. It should therefore be the purpose of human sexuality all through life to fulfill the sexual needs of those engaged in the act based on the agape type of love.

Another of the myths or legends surrounding human sexuality is the forty year syndrome. The theory is that when one reaches the age of forty, the person, especially the male, is no longer potent. No doubt, this belief is related to menopause. Medical science has learned the earliest record of menopause is thirty-five years of age and the latest is fifty-five years of age. Thus, the

normal age for menopause to begin in the female is forty-five. Since this was considered by many as a time of physical and mental discomfort the female rejected the male. The normal relation of intercourse became disturbed. The female because of apparent discomfort did not desire to enter into the act. This led to frustration in both male and female and allowed the growth of false ideas that the male was no longer potent, the female no longer potent. Therefore, because of periodic discomfort, actual and imagined, in the female, the male was told his potentiality was decreasing, that he should no longer think of sexual fulfillment and his life should be directed in other comtemplations and activities. What actually happened and is continuing; is the male found and finds other sexual outlets. Those outlets are the mistress, the prostitute, or the so-called other woman. The fact is that this lasts into later years. Marriage, becomes toleration and the firmness of family life is corroded. In such instances the female may turn to other interests and vocations, often devoting more time to children, other outside interests, maybe, to job if employed and in time possibly to other sexual interests. In short, as the male finds other interests so does the female. It would appear therefore, the forty-year syndrome must be understood in order to bring about a larger happiness and fulfillment throughout life and especially in those considered to be aged.

How can the above be achieved? One way would be to know the truth about human sexuality. Possibly, the asking of certain

questions would aid in the solution to the problem. Some of the questions which might be asked are as follows:

1. Are you having an interesting life?
2. Does your mate laugh and do you laugh together?
3. Do you have strong physical feelings toward each other?
4. What are your ambitions and goals?
5. What about religion?
6. What time do you like to retire?

Further specific questions might be:

1. Can you talk with each other so that you can share feelings, hopes and ambitions?
2. Does your companion dominate the conversation or does he listen as well as talk? Do you?
3. How does your companion act when he does not get his way?
4. Can you make decisions?
5. Does your companion like people and does he keep friends?
6. Just how dependent is your companion upon his parents?
7. Are you afraid of sex?
8. Do you dislike having a person touch you?
9. Can you avoid spending all your income?

We may further ask what causes family deterioration? Though there are many causes within our culture possibly the following are dominant:

1. The use of finance.
2. The failure of communication.
3. The rise of boredom.
4. The rise of monotony.
5. The interference of in-laws.
6. The sex-life.

Looking once again to fulfilling needs of persons engaged in the act of intercourse, the persons involved should discover

the needs of one another. If one partner desires to have intercourse six times a week and the other, two times a week the need factor would be satisfied with three encounters. Naturally, these needs differ in individuals and couples and time is the factor of discovering needs. If these needs are not discovered then again frustation and disappointment set in. Excuses are made and myths and legends are enhanced about the potentalities of the persons engaged in the act. Fulfillment becomes less or not at all. Further, if needs are fulfilled but the cycle is broken then again frustration and disappointment set in. To illustrate, if the couple is having intercourse three times a week and one of these times is missed then frustration, anger, doubt and misapprenhension appear. It is this idea of fulfillment that is questioned in the aging. We often feel the needs of the aging are complete in other interests and no doubt to a certain degree they are but for complete fulfillment and enrichment the total life must be considered and experienced. Myths, legends and stories must be dispelled.

It appears false therefore, to assume that human sexuality in the aging is limited. The truth of the matter is it continues to life's end. It is necessary to dispel false ideas, again myths, legends and stories, of former eras and to center our research on discovering further methods of implementation to total and complete happiness in human sexuality.

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